

Message Text

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ORIGIN AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OC-06 CCO-00 CPR-01 /018 R

DRAFTED BY AF/C:REGRIBBIN:GJB
APPROVED BY AF/C:TRBUCHANAN
S/CP:RGOOKIN (INFO)
OC/P:APANCAMO
AF/EX:JBRYANT

-----030723Z 102881 /21

R 022051Z MAY 77
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA
INFO AMEMBASSY KIGALI

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, AFSP, BY

SUBJECT: CUSTOMS PROBLEMS

REFS: A) BUJUMBURA 451; B) BUJUMBURA 453

1. AF/C OFFICE DIRECTOR CALLED IN GRB AMBASSADOR NZEYIMANA
APRIL 28 TO DISCUSS CUSTOMS PROBLEMS IN BURUNDI.
BUCHANAN OBSERVED THAT IF PROBLEM COHTINUED IT COULD
BECOME SERIOUS IRRITANT TO FRIENDLY BILATERAL RELATIONS.

AMBASSADOR WAS PRESENTED WITH AIDE MEMOIRE OUTLINING
DEPARTMENT'S UNDERSTANDING OF VIENNA CONVENTION
PROVISIONS CONCERNING CUSTOMS PRIVILEGES (COPY POUCHED
TO EMBASSY). BUCHANAN NOTED THAT THE 19 POUCHES IN
QUESTION HAD JUST BEEN RELEASED, BUT THAT THE PROBLEM
OF CUSTOMS HARASSMENT HAD SUFFICIENT HISTORY TO WARRANT
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DISCUSSION WITH AMBASSADOR. HE EXPRESSED HOPE THAT
SITUATION COULD BE RECTIFIED.

2. AMBASSADOR ASSURED US THAT PROBLEM WAS MISUNDERSTANDING
AND OVERZEALOUSNESS ON PART OF CUSTOMS SERVICE. HE
STRESSED POINT THAT HARASSMENT DID NOT REPEAT NOT
INDICATE POLITICAL PROBLEM BETEEN US AND BURUNDI AND WAS

NOT INTENDED AS A SIGNAL OF ANY KIND. NZEYIMANA INDICATED HIS UNDERSTANDING OF ISSUE BY REITERATING PERSONAL CONVERSATIONS WITH DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMS SERVICE (NO LONGER IN POST) PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE FOR U.S. LAST FALL. HE ALSO MENTIONED SEVERAL TELEPHONE CALLS FROM BURUNDI ON THE SUBJECT THIS WEEK AND OBVIOUSLY FELT HIS INTERVENTION WITH FOREIGN MINISTER HAD PLAYED IMPORTANT ROLE. ACCORDING TO AMBASSADOR NZEYIMANA MISGUIDED ZEAL ON PART OF CUSTOMS OFFICIALS ARISES PARTLY ON ACCOUNT OF ORIGIN OF POUCHES. BURUNDI OFFICIALS NOTE THAT "DIPLOMATIC BAG" ARE FROM BRUSSELS, PARIS, NAIROBI AND OTHER NON-U.S. POSTS. AND THAT WE APPEAR TO RECEIVE DISPROPORTIONATELY MORE AND HEAVIER POUCHES THAN OTHER EMBASSIES. BUCHANAN EXPLAINED DECENTRALIZED NATURE OF USG SUPPORT SYSTEM AND CITED SPECIFICALLY RBFO PARIS, RSC BEIRUT, SEA FREIGHT VIA NAIROBI, AND REGIONAL SUPPLY CENTER AT LAGOS AS ORIGINATING POINTS FOR DIPLOMATIC POUCHES. NZEYIMANA OBSERVED THAT APPARENTLY RELATIONS BETWEEN THE EMBASSY AND THE CUSTOMS SERVICE WERE NOT GOOD AND THAT AN EFFORT TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS SHOULD BE MADE. HE SUGGESTED THAT THE EMBASSY DESCRIBE THE NATURE OF AMERICAN SUPPORT SYSTEM AS DISCUSSED WITH HIM TO BURUNDIANS. HE ALSO STATED THAT IN BRUSSELS HE WAS OCCASIONALLY ASKED FOR GENERAL DECLARATION OF THE CONTENTS OF ESPECIALLY HEAVY BAGS...I.E. BOOKS FOR CULTURAL PROGRAM, AND SUGGESTED THAT THIS MIGHT BE HELPFUL IN AVOIDING FUTURE PROBLEMS.

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3. AIDE MEMOIRE AND BUCHANAN ALSO PROTESTED SYSTEMATIC AND DISCRIMINATORY NATURE OF DEMANDS TO INSPECT PERSONAL EFFECTS OF AMERICAN DIPLOMATS.

NZEYIMANA AGREED THAT SYSTEMATIC INSPECTION WAS NOT PROPER BEHAVIOR, BUT NOTED THAT BY NATURE OF THEIR JOB CUSTOMS OFFICIALS HAVE TO BE SUSPICIOUS. BURUNDI OFFICIALS ARE ESPECIALLY CONCERNED WITH SMUGGLING AND APPARENTLY UNSURE OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THIS CONCERN, STRICT LOCAL REGULATIONS FOR INSPECTION, AND VIENNA CONVENTION. AMBASSADOR LATER COMMENTED THAT PART OF PROBLEM WAS POOR COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICTING JURISDICTION BETWEEN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND MINISTRY OF FINANCE. HE ALSO HINTED, HOWEVER, THAT ITEMS FOR PERSONAL RATHER THAN POST USE WERE BEING IMPORTED.

4. AMBASSADOR NZEYIMANA STATED THAT HE WOULD REPORT THE

CONVERSATION AND PASS AIDE MEMOIRE ON TO HIS GOVERNMENT. HE WAS OBVIOUSLY CONCERNED, HOWEVER, THAT POSITIONS NOT HARDEN BUREAUCRATICALLY ON BOTH SIDES, TELLING STORY IN THIS CONNECTION OF INCIDENT SOME YEARS AGO IN WHICH BURUNDI CUSTOMS OFFICIAL BACKED AWAY FROM RELEASING POUCHES BECAUSE OF FEELING WE WERE USING VIENNA CONVENTION TO BLUDGEON HIM. NZEYIMANA EVIDENTLY BELIEVES HE CAN ARRANGE TO MINIMIZE INCIDENTS THROUGH PERSONAL CONTACTS, PARTICULARLY IF EMBASSY WILL EXPLAIN SITUATION IN FORTHCOMING MANNER TO CUSTOMS OFFICIALS. SINCE HE WAS CLEARLY DISTRESSED THAT WE HAD ESCALATED TO FORMAL AIDE MEMOIRE, AF/C DIRECTOR CHOSE USE EXCUSE THAT POUCHES HAD BEEN RELEASED TO DOWNGRADE AIDE MEMOIRE TO ORAL TALKING PAPER. BUT HE UNDERScoreD DEPARTMENT'S ASSUMPTION THAT AMBASSADOR WOULD CONVEY OUR GRAVE CONCERN OVER PERSISTENT INCIDENTS.

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5. COMMENT: WE BELIEVE THAT DEMARCHE HERE WAS SUCCESSFUL IN CONVEYING TO AMBASSADOR SIGNIFICANCE TO USG OF NORMAL FLOW OF DIPLOMATIC POUCHES AND ACCEPTED CUSTOMS PRACTICES FOR DIPLOMATS. MEETING WAS FRIENDLY AND FRANK, AMBASSADOR CONCEDED THAT GRB CUSTOMS PRACTICES NOT ACCEPTABLE, BUT REPEATED CONVICTION THAT PROBLEM IS ONE OF COMMUNICATION AND NOT POLICY.

6. AT RISK OF PROPOSING SUGGESTION WHICH HAS BEEN TRIED AND FAILED, IT MIGHT BE USEFUL TO PROVIDE CUSTOMS SERVICE WITH LIST OF SENDING POSTS INDICATING NATURE OF MATERIAL NORMALLY IN BAGS.

7. OC/P WILL ANSWER REFTEL B SEPARATELY.
VANCE

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Message Attributes

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Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
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Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 02-May-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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Disposition History: n/a
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